SF Chronicle SEP 6 1976

Charles McCabe Himself

Whither the FBI?

IT IS my firm contention that those who live by the media die by the media. It is my confident prediction that the Federal Bureau of Investigation, before it swims out of the sea of sludge it is now morassed in, will have to change its name, among other things.

It is entirely possible that some of the finest brains on Madison avenue are engaged with just this problem. They might be running The Department of Public Purification up the masthead. Or they might be moving into the backstretch with the Institute of Law and Order. Or they might just be jogging along with something like Scotland Yard's Criminal Investigation Department.

But FBI has got to go. The stink about exceeds even that of the other great investigative organization, the CIA. The FBI was once the proudest name in law enforcement, even if only in name.

The Genghis Khan of the bureau, J. Edgar Hoover, looked like a fish that had been left in the sun too long. He was one of the great deadbeats of all time. He wouldn't even pay for a shoeshine if he could charge it to a Texas oilman. You could buy him with a pass to a race track and enough money to take him to the ten-dollar window from time to time. If he ever put money in a poor box you could be sure it wasn't his.

But he had a great propaganda machine. For years a writer named Socker Coe was in charge of the Apotheosis Department of the FBI. Coe ghosted a number of books signed by Hoover and others about St. Edgar.

* * *

HOOVER was low grade ore, all the way but he had a way of getting appropriations for his department. He ran his organization like the Society of Jesus, which passed for good administration. He liked lawyers and accountants from Fordham and Boston College and Notre Dame because they had been brought up to obey bishops, of which he was superbly one.

The title FBI turned out to be far too apposite. Boy, did it ever investigate! The office spent its time spying on hundreds of thousands of Americans who were guilty of nothing worse than that John Hoover did not like the way they thought. And don't think it was John Hoover's bosses. It was J. Edgar himself who instituted the mass of his illicit scrutinies.

* * *

IT IS ALMOST a final irony that the FBI should have been brought to its knees by a pipsqueak organization like the Socialist Workers' Party. The $37 million damage suit brought by the party, because of repeated burglaries of their records by the FBI, has resulted in a series of revelations of the appalling depth of corruption in our once-haloed secret police organization.

In one week recently testimony was made public in which a New York agent told of scores of burglaries he had carried out. Always, under orders of his superiors. The Justice Department learned two other agents "handled" a paid informant who was a burglar for the FBI, and also incidentally for himself while on its payroll.

* * *

MEDICAL insurance funds were investigated for possible misappropriation for high and jolly living. The head of the Minneapolis office during the late 1960s and early '70s, and later associate director of the Bureau, acknowledged his technical responsibility for hassling political militants.

This last was part of the infamous Cointelpro operation, which even congressional investigators in these post-Hoover and post-Watergate days, have not hesitated to call "indisputably degrading to a free society."

Justice Brandeis long ago warned that when law enforcement organizations use unlawful methods to secure their ends, the Republic is in dire danger. The FBI, under Hoover, broke the law for what were largely the ends and aims of the director personally. That such a one-man tyranny could have existed, and for so long, tells us something about the deliberate blindness and subdued perfidy of the men who have led us in Washington.